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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001562

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SUBJECT: JA'AFARI'S FAREWELL: PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S.

Ford for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: At a lavish farewell lunch hosted by President Talabani for outgoing Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Ja'afari on May 8, the entire Iraqi political world showed up to pay their respects. In the end, however, Ja'afari's farewell mirrored his tenure as Prime Minister as all those present barely acknowledged the guest of honor, consumed with the ongoing cabinet formation negotiations and jockeying over prime Cabinet positions. END SUMMARY.

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All of Iraq Turns Out to Say Goodbye...  
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¶2. (C) At a lavish farewell lunch hosted by President Jalal Talabani on May 8, the entire Iraqi political world showed up to pay their respects to outgoing Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Ja'afari. Flanking Ja'afari at the high table were Talabani and Deputy President Adil Abd al-Mahdi; on either side of them were the Ambassador, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, Adnan al-Dulaymi, Rowsch Shaways, Ahmad Chalabi, Tariq al-Hashimi and others. All the political and religious blocs were represented, including the spiritual head of the Yazidis, Prince Hazem Tahsin Said, and the Chaldo-Assyrian (Catholic) Patriarch Emmanuel Delly. In addition, the diplomatic corps in Iraq was invited, including Iranian Ambassador-Designate to Iraq Khazemi-Qomi. Notably absent, however, was former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, who opted not to attend.

¶3. (C) The event took place at the former Baghdad University Visitors' Center, a large plot of land along the river, on a winding country road near Talabani's residence. It had been converted into a private club, according to Talabani's Chief of Staff Kamran Karadaghi, and is run by a Kurd. Foreign Ministry Chief of Staff and Council of Representatives (CoR) member Fawzi Hariri confirmed Karadaghi's information, stating that it is the most modern and youthful of the private clubs in Baghdad, unlike the Saddam-era Hunting Club.

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...Sort Of  
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¶4. (C) Ja'afari's farewell lunch appeared to resemble his tenure as Prime Minister - people wandered in and out of the venue, most of his cabinet sat apart from him, and no one thought to offer a farewell toast or speech commemorating his

administration. Instead, the guests immediately sat down to eat, and then, led by Chaldo-Assyrian Patriarch Delly, all lined up to shake hands and wish him well at the end of the lunch.

¶5. (C) There were, however, some interesting tableaux: Minister of Defense Sa'adun Dulime sat with Minister of Interior Bayan Jabr al-Solah and Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari; Qubad Talabani sat near his father; new Kurdish COR members Ala Talabani and Tania Gilly compared notes for the next session; Saleh Mutlak sat in the back with some companions from his Hewar National Front; Shia independents Qassim Daud and Deputy Speaker Khalid al-Atiya chatted in a corner as new Fadhila member Ali al-Dabbagh looked on. After the formal lunch was finished, as guests were milling about with coffee, Khalid al-Atiya was seen talking earnestly to Mohammad al-Hakim. A few feet away, Chalabi tried in vain to defend himself from accusations by Iraqiyya's Safia al-Suhail that he deliberately leaked 4-year old pictures of her sister dancing at her wedding in Amman to Shia Islamist paper Al-Baynaa. He fled after she accused him of being corrupt, dishonest, and treacherous: "Don't call me crazy! I've known you since we were 18 years old; I know every trick of yours," she scolded. She then whirled around and grabbed a bewildered Bayan Jabr al-Solah and demanded that he investigate Chalabi.

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A Snapshot of Conversations During the Lunch

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¶6. (C) Before the event, Presidency media adviser Hiwa Osman pulled PolOff aside to warn about Ministry of Health officials demanding foreign journalists give blood samples before entering or leaving Iraq to test for AIDS. Osman had received a letter of complaint from a prominent news organization asking for a resolution. During lunch, Fawzi Hariri whispered for assistance in facilitating the Iranian delegation's entry through the International Zone next weekend to present diplomatic credentials to Talabani. Patriotic Union of Kurdistan member Tania Gilly greeted PolOffs during the desserts and complained about spending over an hour arguing with new CoR members about the MCI phones. Apparently, the new CoR members were refusing to use the US Embassy sponsored phones for fear they would be spied upon: as a result, they were asking for Iraqla phones instead, Gilly sighed in exasperation. Talabani also introduced the spiritual leader of the Yazidis, Prince Hazem Tahsin Said, to the Ambassador, characterizing him as "one of the good guys in Iraq." (NOTE: It appears that there is some controversy over whether Said does represent all Yazidis; he has allegedly described the Yazidis as a sub sect of Kurds, earning him Talabani's approval and alienating those Yazidis who are seeking political and social recognition as a separate ethnic group. END NOTE)

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Horse-Trading Continues Over Government Formation

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¶7. (C) In a side conversation, al-Dabbagh informed PolOff that he had been told he would be Fadhila's nominee for the Ministry of Trade. He lamented that it was very difficult getting Fadhila to understand the subtleties of negotiation in Baghdad, and appeared to regret his decision to join the party rather than remain an independent. In another

aside, Karadaghi pointed to al-Suhail and said dismissively, "She's the only one who thinks she can be a Deputy Prime Minister; she's better off taking the Women's Affairs ministry before the offer expires." Hariri expressed frustration that the Sadrists were refusing to relinquish the Transportation ministry (NOTE: This is the only position Hariri really wants to have. END NOTE). Hariri steadfastly insisted that the Kurds did not recognize the "Shia-imposed" points system for awarding ministries. Saleh Mutlak provided some much-needed levity as he solemnly told another PolOff that he was destined to be the "Divine Foreign Minister" and that only he could save the ministry - but he'd also accept Agriculture, Trade, Electricity, or the Commission on Public Integrity.

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Comment  
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¶8. (C) It is to Talabani's credit that he hosted a lunch for his political nemesis, despite Karadaghi's tongue-in-cheek comment that so many people were invited so that they could attest that Ja'afari was actually leaving. This was a relatively peaceful transition of power, and provides some hope for Iraq's political future. What remains to be seen is whether Prime Minister-elect Nuri Kamal al-Maliki can learn from Ja'afari's missteps and whether the new President-Prime Minister duo will work together better than the old one.

SATTERFIELD